Meeting with Allah: Divine Cognition vis a vis Human Mysticism
by
Ayatullah Mirza Mahdi Isfahani

After understanding the meaning of 'meeting with Allah' (*liqa Allah*) in the school of divine revelation and human mysticism, we shall proceed to understand the difference between the two. Meeting with Allah in the school of revelation, as stated earlier, is a level higher than divine recognition that is gained by Allah's introduction and His manifestation on the hearts of His servants. Moreover, this definition is the action of Allah and the servant does not have any role in it except to put himself in the place of this recognition through obedience, obeisance and acting on the obligatory and recommended commands.

Of course, it should be borne in mind that this recognition is gained by preserving the levels of the creature and the Creator (i.e. the creature remains a creature and a distinct entity from the Creator). For, if the creature loses his identity as a creature and merges with the Creator's existence, there would not remain any duality for which recognition would be called for. Basically, such talks that existence is one and that of the Creator, and the only difference between the Truth and His creatures is that of determination and non-determination, limitations and absoluteness, etc. do not hold water at all in the school of revelation. The Holy Quran and traditions of the infallible Imams ('a) have clearly refuted such concepts and called for a distinction between the Creator and His creatures and that there exists no similarity whatsoever between the two. The school of revelation considers the existence of creatures bonded to the Creator's Will *(mashiyah)* and Intention (*iradah*), both of which are the actions of Allah. By His Intention, He initiates a creation that did not have any prior existence and brings it forth from the realm of non-existence. Similarly, whenever He pleases, He destroys this creature which He had granted existence.

But in the school of mysticism, the Creator's existence has worn the robe of multiplicity. Every moment He takes a form and on losing that form, He returns to His state of Oneness (*Ahadiyah*). That is, first He descends and then He ascends. In reality, Creator and creature, Lord and servant, do not exist. Rather, whatever exists is actually Him. The difference lies in the levels of His Existence which, sometimes is in the level of multiplicity *(Kasrat*) and sometimes in the level of unity (*Wahdat*). In multiplicity, He is One (*Wahdat dar Kasrat*) and in unity, He is many (*Kasrat dar Wahdat*).

Therefore, in the school of revelation, as the recognition of a person increases, he realises even more his own servitude and the Lordship of his Creator. Consequently, his humility, modesty, feeling of lowliness and worship increase; he becomes engrossed in the remembrance of his Lord with his entire existence, fulfils the duties of servitude with all seriousness and earnest and considers the slightest disobedience of Allah as inappropriate. At this level, he considers leaving the abominable (*tark-e-awla*) as a capital crime. For, those who become proximate to the Almighty, regard Allah's esteem with such veneration that they strive never to repeat their previous sins and in fact, consider them as highly detestable. '*Hasanatul Abrar Sayyi'atul Muqarribin*' (The good deeds of the righteous ones are considered as bad by the proximate ones).

But in human version of mysticism, when a mystic reaches to the state of 'divine meeting' and annihilation, for him all existence cease to occur except the Truth. Neither there is any worshipper nor any worshipped one for worship to take place; duality is removed and there remains no existent save the Lord.

In this regard, Qaisari opines, "A person who reaches to the state of unison observes that only Allah is existent. There is neither the one who treads, nor the one whom towards whom the journey is undertaken nor treading itself. The existence of the worshipper and his I-ness, although present in the abstract self (*nafsul amr)*, does not observe anything except His existence because the Light of

Truth engulfs him. Thus, for him neither the Lord nor the servant holds any meaning. Only the One Lord exists. At this juncture, if the divine illuminations that dominate the intellects and imagination attract the mystic, and this attraction continues, he joins those enamoured by the Lord's beauty. And if this attraction does not continue, he will receive the illuminations proportionate to its duration. Prayers, fasting and all other religious obligations cease to become obligatory on receipt of this illumination."

(*Risalah al-Tauhid wa al-Nabuwah wa al-wilaya*, p. 32 narrating from *Falsafa e akhlaq*, p. 141. Under this discussion, one can refer to *Sharh e Gulshan e Raz*, p. 304, the fifth daftar of *Mathnavi e Maulvi* and *Al Isharat wa al-tanbihat*, p. 394).

Therefore, the difference between the two schools is basic and fundamental. Here, this discussion will suffice and leaving the details for some other place, we proceed with our main discussion.

The subject of our discussion was the importance, status and significance of *Salat*. And before coming to the main topic, we discussed the importance of meeting with Allah (*leqaaullah*) and also stated that for a believer, there is no aim and goal higher and greater than it. Now, let us proceed to the importance and significance of *Salat*.

Salat which has been made obligatory on His servants by Allah the Almighty and has not allowed them to forsake it in the worst of circumstances, is the moment of 'divine meeting' and proximity with Allah. It is during *Salat* that a pious and abstentious believer attains great heights of divine recognition. *Salat* is attention towards Allah and His remembrance. He says,

أُذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ.

"You remember Me, I will remember you." (Quran, 2:52)

In fact, Allah remembers more those who worship Him than they remember Him. Under the verse

وَلَذِكْرُ اللهِ أَكْبَرُ

'And Allah's remembrance is the greatest.' (Quran, 29: 45),

Imam Baqir ('a) says,

ذِكْرُ اللهِ لِأَهْلِ الصَّلاةِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ ذِكْرِهِمْ إِيّاهُ.

"Allah's remembrance of those who worship Him is greater than their remembrance of Him."

(*Tafsir*, al Qummi, vol. 2, p. 150)

If a worshipper turns towards Allah only once, bows in front of His greatness, feels humble and lowly in His presence, Allah the Almighty will attend to him a number of times with grace, mercy and honour. How sweet, important and honourable it is for a lowly, needy and degraded servant that a Lord, High and Mighty that He is, turns to him and casts His merciful glance and also remembers him! Thus, O servants of Allah! Don't consider your *Salat* as insignificant and do not be negligent in its performance. For *Salat* it is that helps a servant to reach unto his Master and provides satisfaction to him. Amir al Mominin, Ali ('a) explains the meaning of 'Indeed the prayers have been established' (*qad qamat al-Salat)* thus:

حَانَ وَقْتُ الزِّيَارَةِ وَ الْمُنَاجَاةِ وَ قَضَاءِ الْحَوَائِجِ وَ دَرْكِ الْمُنى وَ الْوُصُولِ إِلى اللهِ- عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ، وَإِلى كَرَامَتِهِ وَ عَفْوِهِ وَ رِضْوانِهِ وَ غُفْرَانِهِ.

"The moment of visitation, invocation and fulfillment of needs, achievement of desires, and reaching to Allah (Mighty and Glorified be He) and His honour, pardon, satisfaction and forgiveness has indeed arrived."

(*Ma'ani al akhbar*, p. 41)

The Messenger of Allah ('s) has said,

"*Salat* is from the fundamentals of religion and the satisfaction of Allah, the Almighty lies therein. *Salat* is the method and path of the Prophets ('a). The one who prays, for him is the love of the angels, guidance, belief, light of recognition, abundance in sustenance, physical relief, hatred for the devil, conflict against the unbelievers, acceptance of supplications and deeds. *Salat* is the provision of a believer from this world for the hereafter and is an intercessor for him in front of the angel of death. *Salat* is his companion and mate in the grave and his reply for the questions of *nakir* and *munkar.* The *Salat* of every believer is his crown on the day of resurrection, light on his cheeks, robe for his body, a barrier between him and hell, a help to cross the bridge of *sirat* to reach paradise and is his dowry for the fairies (*hur)* and bounties of paradise. It is through *Salat* that a person attains great heights. For, *Salat* is the purification of Allah the Almighty, confessing 'there is no god but Allah', praising the Creator, glorifying Him, respecting Him and honouring Him, conversing with Him and to invoke Him and turn towards Him."

(*Al Khisal*, p. 522)

Explaining the reason for imposing *Salat* as an obligation, Imam Raza ('a) said to Ibn Sinan, "*Salat* is the confession of Allah's Lordship and purifying Him from any similarity or likeness. *Salat* implies standing before Allah, the Powerful, with a feeling of lowliness, poverty, confessing and seeking forgiveness for the past sins. A worshipper places his forehead five times a day on earth in front of his Lord to express his respect for his Lord so that he does not forget his Master and his Creator lest he becomes ungrateful and unmindful. Moreover, while praying, a servant keeps away from sins and vices and continues with the remembrance of Allah day and night. For, being engrossed in the remembrance of his Lord and standing before Him, keeps him away from the various types of sins and indecencies."

(*Ilalush shar'ia*, p. 317)